

Mimesis in Educational Hermeneutics

PETER KEMP

Danish University of Education

Abstract

Philosophy of education is regarded as an art of hermeneutics that integrates a theory of mimesis in its understanding of the educational transmission. The idea of the master is reconsidered in this perspective in order to overcome the old opposition between classicism and romanticism. In that way the author attempts to respond to the question: What is the secret to pedagogically sound education?

Keywords: philosophy of education, hermeneutics, hermeneutical circle, educational transmission, mimesis theory, romanticism, classicism, authority

I will in this essay attempt to respond to a general philosophical question: What is the secret to pedagogically sound education?

1. Philosophy of Education as an Art Form

The process of formation and education, the object of philosophy of education, is in and of itself an art. It is not only a transmission of knowledge—or information as we say nowadays—from one to the other, nor is it the transformation of rules to praxis; rather, it is an aware communication, which encompasses an intuition of what insights and views can be received in concrete situations. This art requires a talent that comes out in praxis and which is learned in praxis, as it is modeled in Plato's Socrates and Aristotle's 'wise man'.

In modern times it is Jean-Jacques Rousseau on French soil and Immanuel Kant on German soil who pioneer the rediscovery of education as a form of art.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserts in the prelude of his philosophical novel of education *Emile* that his own century has abandoned 'the most useful of all arts, the art of forming [French: *former*] men' (Rousseau, p. 2). And that is an art; 'the acquirement of which demands much time and trouble' (Rousseau, p. 128) for it is not merely about acquiring knowledge but about retrieving that special instrument by which we acquire it. It is a 'difficult task [...] the art of governing without precepts (*gouverner sans préceptes*)' (Rousseau, p. 120). Furthermore, '[...] the success of education is almost impossible' (Rousseau, p. 7), because it not only depends on one's own efforts but also on the development of abilities, organs, and even

material conditions. Abilities and organs are matters of nature and are thus beyond our control, while material conditions are only partly under our control. Even the human influence is only partially under the teacher's control in that other people surround the student as well, and they also influence the development of the student.

However, if there is no educational code what should the teacher then adhere to? Rousseau's response is that educating first and foremost requires an understanding of the various differences in students' predispositions, depending on age and gender—'Every age, every station in life (*état de vie*), has a perfection, a ripeness, of its own' (Rousseau, p. 174). The potential herein will not come about through force but only through free self-realization. Regarding the student Rousseau states: 'Leave him to himself and watch his actions without speaking' (Rousseau, p. 179). In the end, education is what N. F. S. Grundtvig called *life-enlightenment* (Kemp, 1990, p. 117), or what Rousseau remarks in relation to *Émile*: 'Life is the trade I would teach him' (Rousseau, p. 12). And thus Rousseau has classified education as an 'ethic-aesthetic affair' (Schmidt, p. 82).

However, we will return to this classification later. In order to elucidate the origin of modern theory of education, we first have to look at the way in which Kant brought Rousseau's thoughts into consideration. As the story goes, when Kant acquired a copy of Rousseau's *Émile* he skipped his daily stroll and read it in a single stretch. Kant was especially captivated by the idea of education as an art and not merely as a method of instruction and discipline. He developed his own thoughts on the matter in a series of lectures, *Über Pädagogik (On Pedagogy)*, which were published in 1803, the year before his death and, incidentally, when he had become too old and frail to be responsible for his own publications.

Kant understands upbringing—*Erziehung*—as the equivalent of the French *éducation*, which includes aspects of care, tending, disciplining as well as cultivation or formation (*Bildung*). Writing in French, Rousseau obviously did not use the term *Bildung*. But he anticipates its intent in his notion of formation. And like Rousseau, Kant regards discipline as purely negative, having no value if not accompanied by care and cultivation. Care, not as in the relationship between brutes—only simple parental care—but care as a caring for the individual's formation. Accordingly he says: 'Man is the only creature that needs to be educated' (Kant, 1964, p. 697).

Man needs culture since he or she, contrary to animals, not only acts in accordance with instinct but also with his call to freedom. This freedom manifests itself in a primeval state as ferocity and wildness—independent of laws of morality. Kant does not, as Rousseau, believe it man's natural disposition to be good, but man has—as he says in his essay on the radical evil from 1793—both a disposition for good as well as a penchant for evil (Kant, 1793). In the course of history man has risen from his brutish nature and has in this manner become a moral being. Likewise, the child, who is born wild, must be raised up into the cultural by disciplining the penchant for evil and cultivating the disposition for good.

Disciplining is, as aforementioned, only the negative aspect; cultivation is the actual and positive aspect of education. And, like Rousseau, Kant regards this as

an art that shall bestow the wild man his 'second nature' (Kant, 1964, p. 701), so he can advance and reach his 'definition'. But the disposition for good does not lie dormant and complete in man; it must be developed over time, over generations and along with the maturation of the individual. This formation is difficult, yet it is 'The greatest and most difficult problem given man' (Kant, 1964, p. 702). Or rather, in terms of its complexity, the art of education on the level of the individual is the relative equivalent of the art of governing on the political level (Kant, 1964, p. 701).

When both governing and educating are each regarded as an art, it suggests that they are not simply given through our animal nature or instinct. Even so, some aspects of learning occur almost automatically as the student discovers what is harmful and what is useful through practical experience. The true art of education, however, has a direction, a goal, which it is trying to reach, and it is therefore fundamentally dependent on man's *judgement*. The judgement brings man's action in relation to his definition, that is, it is a venturing out that yields a better state of life and enables man to realize a good life. Kant did not mean that the teacher—or the politician on the government level—can do away with man's penchant for evil, and thereby better man, though, the educator can help create a 'better world' (Kant, 1964, p. 705). And there is a connection between the education of the individual and that of the politician: the princes can only create a better world if their heirs receive a good upbringing (Kant, 1964, p. 705).

It is one thing to say that forming and education is an art, it is something else to claim that the philosophy that has education as its object is itself an art. Can we claim that philosophy of education itself is an art, and if so, in what sense can we make this claim?

To begin, we can say that understanding an art must be an art itself. If the pedagogical philosopher has no practical experience in the field of forming and education, he or she will not be trustworthy. The art of education is not a tangible and present object that we can perform neutrally and unengaged; it is an object that only makes when one asks how the good life is realized through formation and education. In the same way, one cannot have a theoretical ethics or a theory about what the good life should be without that theory itself having an ethical stance (Kemp, 1997, pp. 12–15). Writing or talking about ethics without care for the good life will necessarily appear perverse.

But the good life is not simply reality, as we know it, it is also an ideal that we cannot fulfill. We know that Rousseau himself was not a good father, or rather; he fled his responsibility and abandoned his infants. And Kant was unmarried and had no children of his own. Hence we have to concede that even a bad educator or a man with no practical experience can be a good philosopher of education, even though it probably does require the imagination or empathy of a genius to be so.

Consequently, it will ultimately not be philosophy of education's roots in pedagogical experience that makes it an art, as is the case with education as such. Philosophy of education is primarily an art by another virtue, that is, by virtue of being a hermeneutics—philosophical hermeneutics.

2. Hermeneutics of Our Times and the Mimesis Theory

The idea of philosophical hermeneutics—that one develops his or her self by relaying narratives and art as interpretations of one's life—is a notion of how the individual is formed, *gebildet*.

However, the formation of the individual not only happens in the appropriation of text or art, but oftentimes simultaneously in a pedagogical relation—the relation of teacher and student. Can hermeneutics not shed light on this relation as well?

Hermeneutics is theory about understanding and interpretation of texts and arts. In the 19th and 20th century, philosophical hermeneutics has become the investigation of man's life (as existence, society and nature) through the interpretation of texts and arts. Although the two most prominent hermeneutic philosophers are Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) the discipline can be traced back to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Schleiermacher saw it as the art of understanding spoken or written language, in part through uncovering the original intent, and in part through comparative studies of the single text's relation to a larger body of texts.

Philosophy of education that is regarded as an art of hermeneutics takes the discipline beyond the general hermeneutics of humanities that understands man (as language, history, mind and society) through the interpretation of texts and arts wherein humankind has expressed him or herself. In a more specific sense, philosophy of education deals with the values that are relayed in these works as conceptions and ideas of the good life and its ideals and norms for this life. As an ethics or a vision of the good life, pedagogical praxis is the object of a reflecting hermeneutics, which is either itself an ethics or develops an ethics.

This reflection is in relation to its own times, and that is why we find philosophy of education within the famous hermeneutical circle of part and whole. There are general ideals of how man can and ought to be raised, but these ideals still need to be related to current times, conditions of life and concrete situations that make up the substance of the actual perception of the pedagogical field—a field wherein the educator and educational philosopher partake themselves.

Philosophy of education is accordingly the art of understanding, developing and formulating the art of education in relation to its own times. This ought not occur in conflict with contemporary empirical sciences on formation and education, but should be developed in agreement with these. Taking philosophy of education to be an art of hermeneutics does not undermine its status as human science nor the scientific stringency of the philosophical inquiry.

In our time, hermeneutics has achieved an essential import within pedagogical theory and philosophy. Hans-Georg Gadamer's masterwork, *Wahrheit und Methode*, from 1960 opens with an analysis of the importance of the notion *Bildung* (the individual's formation) for the humanities. Formation is, in Hegel's words, the process whereby the human spirit recognizes itself in the other and therefore travels out into the unknown in order to return home to itself rewarded with an understanding that expands one's own self (Gadamer, pp. 7–16, English trans., pp. 10–20).

Hermeneutics can help us illuminate not only the concept of formation (*Bildung*), but also the notion of mimesis. ‘Mimesis’ has been, and continues to be in many ways, driven even more into the background of pedagogical theory than the concept of formation, even though we cannot do without it in the attempt to understand the teacher-student relation. It is in this context that Paul Ricœur’s theory on storytelling or the narrative language has crucial significance. This theory is ever-present in his philosophical hermeneutics in general, as it was first developed in his book on Freud *De l’interprétation, essai sur Freud* (*Freud and Philosophy: An essay on Interpretation*) from 1965 and in his collection of essays *Le conflit des interprétations* (*Conflicts of Interpretation*) from 1969. The key thought in his work *Time and Narrative* is that through the interpretation process of a narrative—which is a linguistic course of events from beginning to end—we mimetically appropriate the text, shedding light on the individual’s life story and thereby wizing him or her. Thus we also find in the same manner the formation of the individual as a hermeneutic process in Ricœur’s work, but now the emphasis is on *mimesis*—the creative imitation.

Ricœur thereby explicates the relation between three moments of the individual’s formation:

- i) We are already formed—there is a *pre-figuration* of action and consciousness.
- ii) We form narratives (plots and stories) and theories—a *con-figuration* of the language and discourse.
- iii) We form and teach ourselves the moment we appropriate stories and ideas—which is a *re-figuration*. This is the actual *mimesis*, the creative representation (the putting forth) of a ‘hermeneutic identity’.

Let us look at how Ricœur develops these three moments.

Based on Aristotle’s notion of *mimesis* Ricœur sees mimesis as a play, the actor’s enactment of a certain character. The three moments he calls mimesis I, II and III. Modern semiotics is focused on mimesis^{II}, that is, the linguistic structures and rules for the actual creation of the text. There is hence a need for a more comprehensive hermeneutics that entail mimesis^I, which precedes the actual text, and mimesis^{III}, which proceeds it in the ‘entire arc of operations’ whereby the practical experience of the act and suffering forms and expands the work, the author and the readers’ (Ricœur, 1983–85, p. 86; English trans., 1984–88, p. 53).

The relation between time and narrative is gleaned through that process: The narrative’s staging of a ‘plot’ delivers the practical experience of that which preceded the story through the practical experience of that which continues it. Hence, the time that becomes human time through the narration already calls for a certain understanding of time that creates a new experience of time. ‘We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time’ (Ricœur, 1983–85, p. 87; English trans., 1984–88, p. 54).

Mimesis^I is the narrative’s use of the world of action of the daily life, its foundation in the everyday from which mimesis draws its substance. This is the

pre-figuration of the narration—the *pre-understanding* of the practical life. We can only retrieve the narrative's meaning because we already are familiar with the meaning given by the everyday world in which we live and in relation to which we understand the meaning of actions, goals, means, success, defeat and so forth. We already have the linguistic capabilities to interpret the occurrences of life, bestowing meaning, value and ethic quality, and whereby we have a notion of time altogether—the relation of past, present and future.

Mimesis^{II} is creating and forming moments, the composition of the 'plot' in the narrative, according to what Aristotle calls, 'necessity and reasonability'. In harmony with the order the narrator instates at the start of the story, what occurs seems to follow necessarily and strike us as 'plausible' and 'credible'. To Aristotle, this order that establishes the story makes it have a beginning, a middle (or a the turn of events) and an ending. This is the *configuration* of the story.

The *configuration* expresses the reason, idea or theme of the story, as when we have followed the entire plot and then recalled or retold it. The narrative competence consists in establishing a configuration of the story by extracting a coherent course of events out of the dispersed occurrences, then, combining these different occurrences (the subject, the goal, the means and so forth) in one plot and in such a way that the line of events carries the content of the story and explains how and why this and no other order of events could have lead to the end and meaning of the narrative.

Mimesis^{III} completes the mimetic process in that the configuration of the text is not experienced as a narrative if we do not appropriate it. Something happens to us as we follow the story line. We become 'new persons'. This is the *re-figuration* of our lives. Aristotle mentions this, in relation to the Greek drama, as a process of purification of our personal fears and our compassion for others and as a resignation and acceptance of the sentiments that overpower us. Today, we have narratives of a completely different sort, for instance the modern novel, and we cannot delimit the *re-figuration* of the narrative to the intended effects of the Greek drama. Narratives open worlds wherein we can dwell; they reconstruct the world of action. It is, says Ricœur, an 'invitation to *see* our praxis as ...' (Ricœur, 1983–85, p. 124; English trans., 1984–88, p. 83), that is seeing it as we see it modelled in the narrative.

What Ricœur calls the *refiguration* is the actual moment of formation. The appropriation of the ideas, conceptions and the tales of the tradition, is good for the individual; it forms and makes it a self without hindering a critical attitude towards the tradition.

This process of formation stands opposed to the Socratic method that aids the delivery of what is already dormant in man. The Swedish philosopher Bernt Gustavsson rightfully claims that the formation of the individual is both a free process and realization of a goal put forth by others (Gustavsson, pp. 32–33). It is at the same time driven by man's need for personal progress and enclosed in an inherited world passed on from a community and a history.

We can learn from both Gadamer and Ricœur that there is no individual formation without a tradition of ideas that the individual inherits, and that there is no

individual formation without a cultural community wherein we the individual resides.

Gadamer also talks of mimesis in his mention of the ‘double mimesis’: One, mimesis in the poet’s representation of the world, and second, the interpretation and enactment or the reader or actor (Gadamer, p. 117).

In modern theories of education the entire notion of mimesis has been repressed. Today the position is that we in no way mimic anything in the process of learning. Even the pedagogical philosopher Van der Ven, whose basis of reflection is Ricoeur’s ethics, did not deal with the notion of mimesis when dealing with pedagogical transmission.

Why this repression? This calls for an answer.

3. The Mimesis Thought Today

Classic Philosophy on Mimesis

Aristotle defines art (*epos*, tragedy and comedy) as mimesis in his *Poetics*, and tragedy is the mimesis that, as mentioned, purifies our personal fear and compassion for others. Mimesis is the creative imitation that the actors perform on stage. Not a mere spontaneous repetition that comes about automatically. Actors represent, that is, they do not just enact the author’s text, rather, they mimic or re-create the characters and express the emotions we know. That is why the representations help us understand our fears and compassion.

Be that as it may, Aristotle’s theory was directed as a critique against Plato who in the tenth book of *The Republic* warns us against art because it is mimesis. He claims that all artists should be expelled from the republic. Are we then to choose between Aristotle and Plato? Not necessarily, for it is, as we remember, the unmoral gods that Homer portrays he warns us against, and in other places Plato seems less critical towards the art (Eggert Olsen, 1996) Plato does himself use mythical stories to end several of his great dialogues.

He was thus not opposed to mimesis as such, for all human action and works ought, according to him, to be mimetic of ideas.

As we read the tenth book of *The Republic* we should probably see it as an overstated critique. Plato exaggerates as other great philosophers do—for instance Kierkegaard, when he in a controversy with the Danish church condemns all pleasure in life, or Levinas in his depiction of the ethical relation to the other: I am the other’s hostage.

Also, one could easily imagine that when Plato did not want us to read Homer it was because the characters in *The Iliad* cry almost all the time. Tears have never been the philosopher’s cup of tea—but perhaps that is the mistake of the philosophers.

Learning as Mimesis

Our entire culture can be seen as a mimetic process, just as there are genes in nature there are ‘mimes’ in culture. This must also be valid for learning.

The most thorough learning is the conscious mimesis (Latin: *imitatio*).

But how do you learn philosophy? Once, when Ricœur and I went for a walk in the forest he told me how he had learned: I read Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and others, *and I wanted to do it slightly better than that*.

I myself have wanted to improve Ricœur's thinking a tiny bit, not that I saw myself as a greater philosopher than he, far from it, but because I could find a small matter where I perhaps could do it a bit better than he.

It is of course hard to do anything better than the master, but every good teacher knows: what is hard is easy if it is interesting while the easy is hard if it is boring.

Critique of the Master

This endeavour meant that I had to criticize Ricœur when he in a conversation once described the internal relation of his philosophy merely as answering the logically implicated questions that followed from prior works. He failed to notice his own social context. It was as if, had the first book been written, then the others would have inevitably followed. It could have been written 200 years ago or today and it would not have made a significant difference.

To criticize the master, however, is the best thing you can give in return for your education.

Clones mistake conscious imitation with copying, which becomes all the more comical when what they try to copy is the originality of the master.

But the great master will be self critical, an aspect the clones do not see, for when they believe they copy their master he already will have moved on to another place.

Today it is out of fashion to say that you mimic someone, and a student should definitely not mimic his or her master. René Girard has called this fear of imitation a *romantic illusion*. What a clone of our times can do is to mimic the master by not mimicking him—admire his originality of being different and therefore defend his extremely original actions and statements as if they were one's own—that is, if anything, imitation acrobatics!

Mimesis Today

In a lot of contemporary literature and theory of education the mimesis thought is oddly absent.

The slogan of the day is: The student is to form him or herself on his or her own terms. Obviously, children have to be taught something, but it seems that knowledge should be beaten into them and then tested through exams—one thing they are not to do is to mimic the teacher. It is, for instance, believed that there is no use in a math teacher displaying excitement. He or she should make himself or herself disappear so that students can focus on the subject. But is this not too shortsighted?

The divergence from mimesis in the field of education is astounding, for there is talk of mimesis in almost every other field, not only in hermeneutics as we have previously seen.

Psychologists speak about mimesis; most renowned is perhaps Piaget's theory on the formation of children's intelligence: Intelligence develops as the child forms, through imitation, words and ideas it can play with. You should therefore not say or do anything that you do not want your children to do. Intelligence develops in a combination of delayed imitation (the child repeats what is absent) and controlled play.

Athletes also work with mimicking: the coach is the teacher who should be imitated. Renowned musicians have all been studying with one or more masters. Many distinguished scientists have had masters, and a young craftsman, cooks, and tailors amongst others undertake apprenticeships.

Mimesis plays a major role in literary theory as well. In his work *Mimesis, Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (*The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*) from 1946 Erich Auerbach shows that mimesis has taken on far more shapes than the Homeric epos Plato criticized. Auerbach demonstrates that narrative is not necessarily for entertainment exclusively but can be created to show a truth, for example the tale of Abraham and Isaac in the Old Testament or Montaigne's story of himself in his *Essais*. This kind of literary mimesis appeals to our sense of responsibility. Why should that not also be possible in the pedagogical relation?

Actually, the social sciences in general do deal with the imitation of body language and rituals (Gebauer & Wulf). But mimesis is in this context, as we find it in Gebauer & Wulf, not the general notion of mimesis as we have formerly used. According to them, social actions are only mimetic insofar as they:

- 1) are movements that relate to other movements
- 2) can be regarded as a bodily act that contains a clear aspect of presentation or performance
- 3) consist in an independent act that can be understood independently, which furthermore relates to other actions or worlds. (p. 12)

This is truly a very limited aspect of the mimesis thought.

4. Repression of the Mimesis Thought

Why is the notion of mimesis repressed in the majority of modern educational theory? Even those who support the notion of the apprenticeship repress mimesis oftentimes by reducing it to a non-theoretical social praxis. Almost no one dares to say that we inherit or take over ideas from others in the education. At most it is mentioned in passing.

The Romantic Revolt and the Mimesis of Classicism

The humanistic thinkers of the renaissance sought, as the word signifies a renaissance, that is, a re-birth of classical culture—Roman and Greek. However, there was a clear conception of what was true mimesis and what was mere replication or

copying. Erasmus of Rotterdam testifies to that, when he, in regards to the dialogue *The Ciceronian: A Dialogue on the ideal Latin Style* (1528), says: 'I support imitation insofar as one does not dedicate oneself to a single style, not daring to leave it not even a little, but rather that everyone or at least the finest authors inheret what is through all times excellent and that which suits the particular mentality' (Quotation of Luther from Østergaard-Nielsen, 1957, p. 159).

Aristotle's *Poetics* was unknown in medieval Europe and was rediscovered by the Italian doctor and philologist Julius Cesar Scaliger, thanks to Pazzi's Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* from 1536. In his *Seven Poetic Books* from 1561 Scaliger claims that the artist (poet, sculptor, painter) performs a mimesis—a mimicking of nature—that comprehends it better than it is immediately perceived. This mimesis is not only an imitation of nature, but also a creation of 'another nature'. Scaliger laid the foundation for classicism.

Classicism wanted, in all its shapes, to mimic nature, human nature in particular, but this was certainly not to be a copying, but a creative presentation of reality—human reality. In early classicism people did not only want to create presentations of living nature, but wanted also to imitate ancient Greek and Latin authors. It was therefore not a dishonor for one to quote 'the elders' without giving reference.

The Dane Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754) excelled in this; for instance when he describes the Copenhagen fire of the 20th of October 1728 in these words: 'One could hear women scream, children cry and men yell, and there was no shortage of people who with fraud and rumors made the peril even more perilous than it already was'—an exact quotation of Plinius the Young's depiction of people's reaction in Pompeii and Herculaneum during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.C. Many of Holberg's descriptions of the event were taken from Plinius and other antique authors, leaving us in doubt as to whether or not he was even an eyewitness himself (Kragelund, p. 18).

The appearance of romanticism meant the collapse of classicism. It put such an emphasis on the imagination (which classicism also had underscored) that the artist's individual realization of his or her personal artistic persona became the focus and imagination became increasingly exotic (the Middle Ages for instance was recast as being more interesting than the Classic age). Furthermore, art was more about stirring the emotions of the readers or audience than it was about enlightening them. This opposition is depicted in Schiller's *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*: Classicism is, in its attempt to reproduce the simple truth, too naïve, and romanticism is too sentimental in its reflections on emotional affect.

Now came the end to unreferenced quotes! In Wilhelm von Humboldt's new university from the early 19th century any unreferenced imitation or quote was regarded as plagiarism and considered to be serious academic misconduct (Liedmann, p. 238)—just as we in our days have rules against plagiarism. This is in accordance with our ideals of the individual and genius.

Of course this development also needs to be seen in light of the invention of the art of printing and the possibility of pirated reprints of works in the humanities. Pirated editions threatened authors' livelihood and Kant and Diderot were eager to defend authors' rights in relation to their work (Hénaff, p. 474). The text is

regarded as a part of the author's person and it was for that reason only the publisher who had an agreement with the author and could therefore print the text.

The copyright, however, must inevitably be limited in time and thus cannot in and of itself explain the disappearance of the mimesis thought. The repression of the mimesis was in the end caused by the belief that man develops his or her own thoughts that belong exclusively to oneself and makes up one's character; thoughts do not come to be through anyone else.

Romanticism also critiqued the technique of memorizing—the head of the family and the priest's instruction of Luther's *Small Catechism* and the examination of children at confirmation. If you did not pass the exam you could not take part in the communion. The Danish educator Grundtvig's critique of the harsh disciplinary methods in 'the black school' is a part of this movement.

The Theological Reckoning with the Imitation Thinking

Classicism is a literary critical movement tied up with humanism and oriented towards classic philosophy and literature. Classicism was, however, not a religious movement and we do find a completely different attitude towards mimesis in the field of theology. Reformatory theology moved away from the imitation thinking before it even took hold in humanistic poetics.

The impugnation of mimesis—or imitation—was a part of Luther's critique of monastic piety, which he accused of expelling those who did not belong to the host of the saved. He regarded the imitation thought as a sign of man's belief that he could reach salvation through good deeds and not through belief in Christ. In order to save man from a self-centred faith, we were no longer to imitate the saints, but to conceive of his life as one determined by 'vocation and station' (*vocatio*), where good deeds are done in joy of salvation. Even Jesus was not to be imitated, for 'one must be filled by Christ before you follow him' (Østergaard-Nielsen, p. 159)—it is not the believer who imitates Jesus, but Christ who fills and guides the one who believes.

It is worth noting that the imitation, which is criticized here, is understood exclusively as a repetition of a pattern, and moreover, it is impossible for the creative and productive life to be lived in imitation (Wingren). Consequently, the monastic piousness, that wanted to imitate Christ, was accused of losing touch with the intimate life lived through family and work. This denunciation of the imitation thought most likely brought about the contemporary reluctance for regarding pedagogical relation as an imitation relation.

Moreover, we have Kierkegaard's critique of the idea of imitation, thinking that the individual can realize the imitation of Christ, in reality it is nothing but hypocrisy. Kierkegaard's dispute with Mynster and Martensen in his conflict with the Danish church was a token of this critique.

A more contemporary critic of the mimesis thinking (which actually has a religious air to it as well) is the French-American academic who focuses on literature and religion, René Girard. Girard depicted the call for imitation and mimicking—mimesis—as both the basis of our culture and the root of all evil. He, however, does not accuse this need of being self-centred; rather he accuses it of creating an

impossible community, which, as a result, will end in the violation of others. We then focus on a scapegoat in our efforts to dispose of the violence. This fixation on the scapegoat can only be surpassed the moment the innocent human occurs who, despite of this innocence, willingly takes the blame in an attempt to create peace and harmony and is thus not the object of divine retribution but rather a testimony to God's devotion. Consequently, Christianity is left standing as the only religion that can save man from the vicious circle of imitation.

Girard rediscovers the call for imitation in the teacher-student relation, which he describes in the book *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Girard, p. 314): The teacher wants disciples and imitations of him or herself. The moment these disciples begin to imitate him or her too precisely and threaten to surpass their role model it becomes too much for the master; who in turn becomes, jealous and hostile and begins asking more and more of the student hoping that he or she will succumb to the pressure. The only mistake the disciple made, however, was excelling. The master only wants to be imitated in moderation; the master does not want to be outdone. The disciple is fascinated with the master and is therefore unable to keep a distance and realize that the master has in fact become a rival.

In this tension between the demand: 'imitate me!' and, the demand: 'do not imitate me!' Girard sees two options that are equally bad: in the archaic society the one option is realized; here the individual choice is suppressed to the extent that the student cannot possibly position him or herself as a rival to the master. In modern-day society, conversely, the other option is practiced; all prohibitions must be removed and we then abolish all rituals that introduce the young into the community. The upbringing is left with solving all the problems by awakening 'desire's natural spontaneity' (Girard, p. 315). He or she is left in the tension between the two opposing demands of imitate/imitate not.

But is Girard right? Must the teacher-student relation end in jealousy? I don't think so. I think it is possible for the teacher and the student to maintain the distance that will prevent jealousy—obviously, this is only possible if I as the teacher do not want my student to repeat everything I do, and if I, quite the opposite, hope for and invite a constructive and challenging student-teacher relation so that the student can become my teacher as well. Further, if I as the student do not regard the teacher as infallible, believing that I cannot make even small improvements.

The Scientific Rejection of Mimesis

As Gaston Bachelard has shown, much scientific knowledge is achieved through the transgression of epistemological barriers—our beliefs that natural processes happen in concert with our immediate perception of phenomena. We have to realize, for instance, that the electric light bulb is not a fire that requires oxygen to light up, and that the airplane is not a bird that flaps its wings to fly.

Truly, science should not imitate our immediate perceptions in the everyday space and time to explain physical processes, but should actually call into question these perceptions. On the other hand, physical and technical notions should not

dictate our understanding of what is utmost human: happiness, sorrow, love, and communication. Accordingly, the deepest form of communication is not an exchange of information but rather the confirmation of the other's existence, the appreciation of the other.

5. The Mimetic Formation

Seduction Through True Authority

It goes without saying, of course, that we are bodily creatures—even when we theorize—but the body is the background in this case and not the entirety. The master of theory can seduce as well, and should, as a true master, seduce a little in order to pass on insights and thoughts—a seduction that should conquer the wall and help us break free of our self-centred encirclement.

But we are terribly afraid of the seduction, and thereby afraid of trusting the master. This imitation is fear of the true authority, which does not spring from the other's superiority and manipulation nor does it call for absolute obedience. Rather, this dread is the recognition of the master's experience, an experience I have waiting and from which I can learn something. The authoritative has no true authority; at most he can instil respect out of fear.

The truth is, *we choose our own masters freely but not, as it is so often assumed today, on our own terms*. No matter what master we seek out we can never choose the terms. I cannot merely decide to be different from others. In an apprenticeship it is impossible, even ridiculous: Initially I should try to be like the master, and then, I should try to do it a little better.

Mimesis in the Teacher-Student Relation

In closing, mimesis must be understood as a productive imitation that enters into all individual formation and education. Out of the fear of indoctrination, unification and manipulation, we distrust individual formation and education as imitation. This fear can be overcome if we, as Ricoeur, conceive of the imitation in the teacher-student relation as a creative mimesis. This creative mimesis breaks through the self-enclosure of the subject without enlisting it in the anonymous masses of rank and file.

The teacher is the representative of the historical community. The teacher, highly critical or not, is the intermediary of traditions, for even critiques must be based on premises and conceptions of man in order to be sound. Consequently, the teacher has something to offer the student, something to be imitated; the teacher cannot merely be the occasion that spurs the student to bring out truths hidden inside.

The best teacher is the one who can make his or her student autonomous. Mimesis must be a creative imitation, and that naturally can only happen if the student appreciates the teacher—even when considering a particular teacher as the best teacher for him or herself. The teacher forms the student, but the student forms him or herself through the choice of teacher he or she wants to follow as the master.

In this process they both have to expect that one another and each themselves will attain and offer insights that will enrich and develop. In the ultimate and ideal relation to the student, the teacher has also become a student and the student a teacher. Together they create and form the good life.

Philosophy of education—as I see it—concerns the structure of the mimetic formation of the individual. Philosophy of education is more value laden than any other of the humanities. It is normative as it has an aim: The formation of society and of the individual—the process itself is a goal. And philosophy of education has an ideal: a society where everyone, at least in principle, has the opportunity to increase their cultural capital—insight, knowledge, capacity and competences. Finally, philosophy of education has normative criteria for intellectual and ethical soundness.

Translated by Kelly and Christoffer Kyst

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